

Lesson 294 • October 21

“My body is a wholly neutral thing.”

Practice instructions

See complete instructions in separate document. A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

Practice suggestion: Think of a number of features of your body that you either like or dislike. With each one, say:

I see this [name the bodily feature] as [good, bad].

It is neither good nor bad.

It is a wholly neutral thing.

Commentary

This statement sums up the Course’s attitude towards the body. It is “neither good nor bad” (2:2); it is *neutral*. It derives its value or its harm from the use to which we put it, the purpose that it serves.

There is a view of the body that sees it as inherently good, always deserving that we respect its wishes. If I am sexually aroused by someone I should indulge that urge. If I am hungry I should eat; if I am tired I should sleep. All repression of physical desires is wrong. This view is incorrectly identifying the body with my self. It deifies the body and makes it not only good, it makes it God.

There is another view that sees the body as inherently evil. Therefore I must master and repress all my bodily urges. This approach denies that the body is in any way an expression of my self. It makes a devil of the body. It produces endless guilt over every physical desire.

The body, says the Course, is not good and not bad. It is neutral. Not sinful, nor sinless. Its only usefulness is in awakening from the dream, or in communicating salvation. Such an approach does not make the mistake of identifying myself with my body. It does not make me wrong for having urges, nor does it make me wrong for ignoring some of those urges. It neither exalts nor condemns the body. It accepts the body as a tool, useful for the purpose of truth and nothing else. It sees no purpose in purely bodily ends.

The lesson states, “I am a Son of God” (1:1). And I am not “another thing,” “mortal and corruptible” (1:2–3). God did not create the mortal and corruptible body, and a Son of God has no use for what must die (1:4). Yet if the body is seen as a neutral thing it “does not see death” (1:5). Why? Because “thoughts of fear are not invested there, nor is a mockery of love bestowed upon it” (1:5). We (apparently) experience death when we see the body as evil (“thoughts of fear”) or as good (“a mockery of love”). Holding the body as neutral “protects it while it has a use” (1:6). In other words, to the mind that is healed, the body is immortal until its work is done. It lasts as long as it is needed for the mind’s purposes of healing in this world, and then it is simply “laid aside” because it no longer has a purpose (1:7). This is not *death* but simply the end of the body. As *The Song of Prayer* puts it, “We call it death, but it is liberty” (S-3.II.3:1).

When a mind that is healed no longer needs the body, the body is simply laid aside. “It is not sick nor old nor hurt. It is but functionless, unneeded and cast off” (1:8–9). There have been a few

who have experienced this kind of bodily end that is not death. Robert tells me of reading of a Tibetan monk who, one day, announced to his followers that his work in the body was almost finished and that he would be leaving the body in a few months. He named the exact date. And on that day, he sat in meditation in full lotus, and simply left. He was “not sick nor old nor hurt.” His body was simply “unneeded” any more.

How can we attain to such a high state, and such a gentle death (if it can even be called “death”)? The lesson indicates that our path lies in the direction of gradually coming to see our bodies as “of service for a while and fit to serve, to keep its usefulness while it can serve, and then to be replaced for greater good” (1:10). It is neither a burden nor an end in itself. It is simply a tool. We use it, in this dream, “to help Your plan that we awaken from all dreams we made” (2:3), and for nothing more than that. Seeing the body as neutral is what protects it while it has a use in this plan. As we align our minds with God’s plan, we value the body for its usefulness in fulfilling the plan, and not for itself. We neither exalt it nor abuse it. We do not strive either to keep the body or to leave it. We simply use it to fulfill our function.